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ABSTRACT

Throughout their history, most black institutions of higher education have struggled against debilitating circumstances: antagonistic communities and legislatures, poverty, poorly prepared students, competition from white colleges, and program duplication with white institutions. In the period of serious desegregation at the elementary and secondary levels, a different approach has been needed for higher education. Two broad alternatives have evolved: elimination of marginally successful black colleges, or enhancement of their programs and desegregation efforts. A variety of approaches have been taken to the concept of enhancement. Some, such as funding for more efficient management, emphasizing the institution's unique role, and changing the school's name, have a negative aspect. Others are more positive: deliberate placement of attractive programs in black institutions, improvement of student quality at entry, employment of able faculty to attract good students and funding to support their efforts. Simple infusion of extra money to black colleges may be necessary for states to disregard formula or budget guidelines and provide some "catch-up" funds to correct years of under-funding. It may also be necessary to provide the administrator with discretionary powers to adjust procedures and policies to clearly benefit the institution and its students. In sum, it is essential not to eliminate black colleges, which have fulfilled their purposes well in general, despite difficult obstacles. (MSE)

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Enhancement or Elimination - Which for Black Institutions of Higher Education in the Eighties?

Joseph T. Durham*

American higher education has been characterized by the diversity of institutions in the "Academic Procession." The "Ivy League" colleges, the "Seven Sisters" and "Colleges for Forgotten Americans" are all included in the boundaries of American higher education. In a racially conscious society, it was inevitable that a special class of institutions would be created; hence colleges for black Americans were also founded. Most of these historically black[1] institutions were established in the wake of the Civil War to provide the newly-freed slaves an education. For over a hundred years, the black colleges have served their constituency, providing education in an area and era when blacks were not accepted or tolerated (except in exceedingly rare instances) in the mainstream institutions. Perhaps the most singular accomplishment of the historically black colleges is that 80% of blacks who hold baccalaureate degrees have received them from these institutions. Further, more than 90% of black Ph.D. holders were granted baccalaureate degrees by historically black schools.

Black colleges and universities have supplied a long list of prominent national leaders and just plain average citizens. Among the list of distinguished alumni of black schools are Azie Taylor Morton, Treasurer of the United States, Patricia Roberts Harris, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, and Andrew Young, former U.S. Representative

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to the United Nations. In politics, law, education, medicine, and the arts, the graduates of American black colleges and universities have contributed to the well-being of the nation. Indeed, the black college is a national resource which must be preserved.

Throughout their history, most of the black institutions have struggled against debilitating circumstances. With the exception of one or two, black institutions were located in the deep South and were forced to survive in the face of atagonistic communities. Financial existence was a perennial problem. Students were poor and needed assistance. State legislatures were niggard and often tardy in their appropriations. One wrong step by an administrator or one bad report on a faculty member or even a student could imperil an entire institution dependent upon the few crumbs from the purse of a hostile Southern legislature.

Even though these institutions were colleges and universities in name, vast numbers of their students came with deficient high school backgrounds. Thus, in addition to the crushing social and financial burdens, these institutions had to struggle to lift the academic performance of marginal and below-average students in four years to a level of normal collegiate performance. Yet, to their credit, hardworking and heroic teachers and administrators made bricks without straw and brought generations of boys and girls into meaningful adulthood and academic competence. This feat - which the black institutions continue to perform - is enough, in the view of some, to justify their continuation in today's integrated society. The task of educating generations of marginal students was not and is not being done on a scale which the black institutions have accomplished.

II

Today the future of black institutions of higher education is being questioned in many quarters. The advocates of integration wonder if racially identifiable colleges are compatible with the vision of a fully integrated society. Some Federal officials see the black institutions as vestiges of a racially segregated society which are no longer compatible with the law. Even within the black community there is a feeling expressed by some, that black institutions cannot offer the same quality of instruction as white institutions and, therefore, should be closed down. This questioning of the continued existence of the more than one hundred historically black institutions comes at an ironic time because many of them have observed the centenary of their founding and are now well into the second century of their existence.

The struggle for existence is not new to black institutions. Their history has been a recurring story of fending off those in the dominant society who would devour and destroy. The power structure has developed over time a number of strategies for dealing with black institutions. First, there was deliberate separation. This separation was, in the case of some colleges indicated in their names which contained expressions such as "for Negroes" or designations such as "Agricultural and Mechanical" or "Agricultural and Technical." Sometimes the separation was geographic and resulted in the literal placement of a black institution across the railroad tracks or in some out of the way place that was not easily accessible.

The constant threat of being closed was ever-present for many black schools. When the famous Flexner Report of 1910 was made, five black medical schools ceased operating,[2] leaving only the Meharry Medical School and the School of Medicine at Howard University as the suppliers of 75% of the black doctors in America. Other schools such as the black

community colleges of Florida and the former Louisville Municipal College in Kentucky were closed as part of the desegregation process.

Still other black institutions have been transformed into institutions with predominantly white student bodies. At least three formerly black institutions, situated in border states, have undergone distinct changes in the racial composition of their student bodies. These institutions are West Virginia State College and Bluefield State College, both in West Virginia, and Lincoln University in Missouri. In each case these colleges have student bodies that are more than 50% non-black. When black colleges were not closed, a cosmetic change was affected by means of changes in name or governance. Thus, the former Maryland State College lost its identity when it was merged into the University of Maryland system in 1971. In North Carolina, the five black public institutions were all designated as universities and were brought under the governance of the University of North Carolina system.

In the state of Georgia a favorite ploy was to place a white institution in every locality in which a black public institution existed. Thus Albany State College was forced to compete with Albany Junior College. Savannah State College was forced to compete with Armstrong State College and black Fort Valley State College was forced to compete with Macon Junior College. This strategy blocked the expansion of black institutions.

Finally, when none of the above was done, program duplication was allowed to run rampant and programs were approved for white institutions even though the black institution already had an established program. The following chart shows the program duplication at the graduate level permitted in the Baltimore Metropolitan area after the University of Baltimore was admitted to the public sector of higher education:

Degree Programs	Institutions	Date Initiated
M.B.A.	Morgan State University	1970
	University of Baltimore	1972
M.S.-Recreation Administration and Supervision	Morgan State University	1970
M.S.-Urban Recreation	University of Baltimore	1974
M. Ed.-Criminal Justice	Coppin State College	1969
M.A.-Criminal Justice	University of Baltimore	1974

Source: State Board for Higher Education

This brief account of the problems the black institutions have encountered explains why they have developed a "siege mentality." It would have been difficult for them to have done otherwise.

III

The "Brown" Decision of 1954 established a "great divide" for American education. Prior to 1954 there had been breaches in the walls of desegregation in education. In light of the decision that "separate but equal" was not legal, the breaches became more frequent, and desegregation both in the nation's public schools and in higher education took on a sense of urgency. Consequently, a considerable body of case law which regulated the desegregation of the nation's public schools was developed. Indeed, the achievement of desegregation in public school education was different from the achievement of desegregation in institutions of higher education. In the public schools specific assignment of students and busing were often used. In the case of higher education, where student choice is the norm, different approaches were necessary.

The heightened social consciousness of the Sixties inevitably affected higher education. The tragic assassination of Martin Luther King and the urban riots which followed in its wake, sensitized America to the two nations - one white and one black - which existed. As a consequence, higher education sought to be more responsive to the needs of blacks and minorities, and increased numbers of black students were admitted to formerly all-white institutions, Ironically, these institutions which admitted black students also became the scene of student demonstrations and "sit-ins" with both black and white students making demands upon the administrations of the schools.

Furthermore, the increased social awareness of the period produced governmental pronouncements such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Executive Order #11246 of President Lyndon Johnson, and the Education Amendments of 1972. Governmental initiative was accompanied by action in the legal field as evidenced by the Adams Case.[3]

This period of widespread student activism, governmental action, and legal effort subjected American higher education to intense examination and produced recommendations that colleges and universities should be integrated, that the vestiges of a dual system should be eliminated, and that the burden of desegregating higher education should not fall heavily or unduly on the historically black institutions. But how can this be done? Therein lies the dilemma of the desegregation process. Can the system of higher education be desegregated without destroying the racially identifable black college? Can the presence of black students be numerically increased in formerly white institutions without decreasing their numbers in black institutions?

It was inevitable that a period of examination for higher education would also focus on the historically black institution. At one extreme was the possibility of their elimination. In 1967, two Harvard professors, Christopher Jencks and David Riesman,[4] published a critical essay in the Harvard Educational Review. Characterizing most black institutions as "academic disaster areas," Jencks and Riesman predicted an uncertain future for these colleges and universities. One remedy for such a calamitous condition was closure. Why should such undistinguished institutions continue to exist?

By 1977, a second remedy was being suggested for black institutions, particularly those in the public sector. This alternative - enhancement - emerged from the Adams litigation. It became clear from the Adams Case that specific criteria were needed which would serve as the basis for determining when a state had developed an acceptable plan for the desegregation of its collegiate system. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare, in response to a court order, developed initial criteria which were promulgated in July 1977. These criteria were to "take into account the unique importance of black colleges."

In February 1978 the desegregation criteria were revised and published in the Federal Register.[5] Specifically, the revised criteria mandated that an acceptable plan for state desegregation of higher education should address the problems of admission, recruitment, and retention of students, the placement and duplication of program offerings among institutions, the role and enhancement of black institutions and changes in the racial composition of college and university faculties.

Noting that these "criteria will be applied to a state which formerly operated a dual system of public higher education under state law,"

HEW further stated that the transition to desegregated institutions should not "be accomplished by placing a disproportionate burden upon black students, faculty, or institutions ..."[6] Hence, the concept of the "enhancement" of black institutions emerged as the talisman that would preserve the historically black institution as the desegregation process moved forward.

Elimination or enhancement? Which way for the historically black institution? The remainder of this paper will explore these two alternatives.

IV

The concept of the enhancement of the historically black institution is not without its difficulties. Not the least of the difficulties is the meaning of the term when applied to institutions of higher education. Webster's New World Dictionary (p. 464) defines the verb enhance to mean "to make greater, as in cost, value, attractiveness, etc." The use of the term enhancement in the Federal Register seems to have this definition in mind. However, it may be that what is done to enhance black institutions for black students may at the same time render the institution less attractive for non-black students. In short, can enhancement and desegregation ever be reconciled? A few examples may make the point.

In the State of Maryland, a task force was appointed to recommend means by which historically black institutions can be enhanced. Among the recommendations made was the notion that "A degree of conscientious funding - beyond the conventional funding - must be provided to allow the historically black colleges to further enhance their role and image and to develop internal management systems to achieve greater efficiency in realizing institutional objectives."[7] The task force undoubtedly felt that this was a sound recommendation. A closer scrutiny of it, however, reveals

an underlying attitude which is patronizing. Whether the task force intended it or not, the recommendation assumes that black colleges are operated less efficiently and need more help in the area of management than white colleges. To grant additional funding to black institutions on the basis of achieving additional efficiency conveys the impression that black administrators are ineffective and inefficient.

Some proponents of the enhancement concept believe that historically black institutions can be made attractive by emphasizing the unique role that they have played in educating disadvantaged students. The proponents seem to suggest that this role should be magnified and intensified. To highlight the role of the black institution in this regard may enhance the image of black institutions, but it may not facilitate desegregation. It may be that the more the uniqueness of black institutions and their history of working with disadvantaged is stressed, the less attractive these institutions become for white students, and for that matter, for a large number of black students as well.

A few states have sought to enhance the historically black institution by affecting a name change. Thus, some black institutions have been redesignated universities without the faculty, programs or financial support which the appellation connotes. This is an academic travesty of the worst sort.

Despite these negative examples, enhancement can have a positive side. For example, the deliberate placement of attractive programs with adequate budget and human support at historically black institutions should be a positive factor in their enhancement. A state which plans to build a new school of health sciences, for example, might establish it at a black institution and provide the support necessary to have a first-rate

program, facilities, and faculty. A relatively obscure school can be lifted to prominence by the placement of an attractive and well-supported program which draws students and well-known faculty members. This idea was presumably in the minds of those who recommended and legislated university status for Morgan State College.

Through the mechanism of academic program placement states have a potentially powerful method of enhancing historically black institutions. For example, how many black institutions have outstanding programs in computer and information sciences, or communications, or journalism, or marine biology? Throughout the desegregation process most states have been slow to assign unique academic programs to black institutions, and practically all of the states have been reluctant to award the level of budgetary support which would ensure that these institutions can compete with the best traditionally white institutions.

Another enhancer for historically black institutions is the improvement of the quality of students who are admitted. In economics there is Gresham's Law which states that bad money drives good money out of circulation. There is a comparable phenomenon in higher education; namely, that bad students tend to drive away good students.

For some time, black institutions have complained about the "brain drain," that is as white institutions sought to desegregate themselves, they attracted increasing numbers of the most able black students, leaving those less able to black institutions which had neither the amount or scholarship aid nor the right kind of academic programs to hold their own in the competition for enrollment. The advantage the white institutions had was further highlighted by the anticipated decline in the 18-25 college-age group. Realizing that fewer students in this age category are

available, white institutions turned more and more to black students to fill their freshman classes. In Virginia, the Fall, 1979 freshman class of two white institutions: James Madison University and Virginia Polytechnic and State University was 10% less than expected.[8] At the same time, Virginia State lost substantial numbers of white graduate students, as well.

The tug-of-war for students illustrates another dilemma of desegregation. The number of potential college-age students is finite; consequently, the movement of black students to white institutions inevitably affects the movement of black students to historically black institutions. As a matter of fact, the Federal criteria for evaluating the desegregation of dual state systems delayed setting goals for white enrollment in black institutions and noted that setting this goal "must be preceded by an increasing enrollment of black students in the higher education system and at the traditionally white institutions."[9] On the other hand, some white institutions blame the failure to achieve black enrollment goals on the fact that black institutions have continued to maintain high percentages of black students.

The flight of black students to predominantly white institutions has another dimension. There is evidence that blacks with higher SAT scores are electing to enroll in white institutions leaving those with less desirable scores to be admitted to the historically black institutions. With increased numbers of students who are under-prepared and needing remedial instruction, the black institutions have become known as institutions which are attended by the poorly qualified. This image repels good students and decreases the recruitment power of black institutions for the academically capable student. Thus, the "bad" student drives out the "good" student.

Educating the under-prepared student is not a new activity for black institutions. In fact, as has been pointed out, generations of students who would not have received a college education were graduated because a black institution took them as they were and provided the stimulation and environment which enabled them to enter the educational and academic mainstream. Indeed, the annals of black institutions are replete with true stories of young people who came in with SAT scores of 250 and later were admitted to the best graduate schools in the nation. Between their admission and graduation there was an untiring faculty and a supportive environment that stimulated application and achievement. Black institutions continue to work with the under-prepared student; however, these institutions also aspire to teach the talented student as well. Black institutions have without apology accepted a variety of students distributed over a wide spectrum of abilities and have perfected techniques of instruction which only now historically white institutions have found necessary to adopt.

Attractive programs and aspiring students require able faculty members. The employment of able faculty is another means of enhancing the historically black institution. As the dominant institutions responded to affirmative action pressures to add minority faculty, many historically black institutions found it hard to retain their senior faculty who were spirited away by attractive and lucrative offers from Ivy League schools, large state universities, and in some cases, schools of lesser renown. Thus there has been a black faculty "brain drain" to white institutions as well as a student "brain drain."

In the Sixties, blacks were added to the faculties of predominantly white institutions. However, few were granted tenure or membership in regular academic departments, according to Moore and Wagstaff.[10] These

authors concluded that black educators and administrators in predominantly white institutions are limited in numbers and quite a few black scholars are returning to black institutions. On the other hand, some black faculty never left; they remained in the historically black institutions. They chose not to accept the tempting offers from more prestigious white institutions and dedicated themselves to being role models and providing excellent tutelage for their students. If black institutions are to employ and retain able faculty, they must have funds for better facilities and equipment, provide opportunities for research, and attract more students who are capable of doing college-level work.

The suggestion most often made for the enhancement of historically black institutions is to increase the amount of money available to them. Undoubtedly this suggestion is made because these institutions have been traditionally under-financed when compared to their white counterparts. Moreover, conventional wisdom holds that having more money is an effective way to solve problems. There are few, if any, historically black institutions which would not profit from increased revenues. However, the simple infusion of additional money alone may not provide enhancement for the black institution. This observation is particularly true for publicly supported institutions which must respond to a multiplicity of rules and regulations from governmental offices. In many states, for example, institutions are governed by line-item budgeting and only specific items cited in the budget can be purchased. There is often not the flexibility to shift funds at the institutional level without elaborate justification and bureacratic maneuvering. Again, public institutions are obliged to follow standardized personnel procedures which prescribe who must be hired from a list and in what order. Under such procedures,

no matter how well suited an applicant may be for a particular vacancy, the President or other hiring official has little leeway in such matters.[11]

The rules and regulations under which institutions operate were designed to promote efficiency and to provide safeguards for the utilization of public funds. It must be recognized, at the same time, that there is frequently tension between the day-to-day operation of an institution and the enforcement of procedures developed in a central office. In order to enhance an institution, it may be necessary to provide the chief executive and his staff with discretionary powers to make adjustments in procedures and policies when these adjustments will clearly benefit the institution and the students it serves. At all times, the burden of responsibility for demonstrating the need for the adjustment and the flexibility must rest with the President of the institution.

State governments usually apply formulas to the funding of public institutions. Because black institutions may have small enrollments and larger numbers of students needing special instructional resources and services, the application of formula to a historically black institution may result in an inadequate budget. In order to enhance the institution it may be necessary to disregard the formula or budget guideline and instead provide "catch-up" funds to correct years of under-funding.

There is the possibility that state governments will not consider these financial recommendations favorably. In the present period characterized by economic stringency, declining enrollments (though the enrollment decline is less noticeable for historically black institutions), and growing disillusionment with higher education, state legislatures are reluctant to increase funds and they are extremely reluctant to permit flexibility and the exercise of budgetary discretion at the institution level.

Black institutions have seldom been granted a high degree of financial and budgetary autonomy. The irony facing historically black institutions is that the steps which should be taken to provide enhancement, will necessitate changes and shifts in the attitude of the power structure, and so far, the dominant society has not been willing to make these changes. Moreover, at a time when black institutions need increased budgetary support, the national economy is constricted, and predictions of fewer funds and fewer institutions are being made. The state of the economy is bleak. In addition, the demographic outlook indicates that the supply of 18-24 year olds will decline in the 1980's; this decline, according to some experts, will forecast the closing of as many as 200 or more small institutions over the next decade.[12]

In the current literature of higher education, the term "institutional euthanasia," referring to the demise of predominantly white colleges has appeared.[13] The term developed out of the realization that there are some historically white institutions which are threatened by imminent closing. There is now the awareness that historically black institutions are not the only ones threatened by the possibility of elimination. It is conceivable that some black institutions as well as some white institutions should be eliminated or closed; indeed, some have already closed.

To call for the elimination of all historically black institutions is to ignore the unassailable record of these institutions. Further, the cry to eliminate them assumes that black colleges are monolithic in character. Such is not the case. There are outstanding black public institutions such as Texas Southern University and Morgan State University. There are also outstanding black private liberal arts colleges such as Talledega College (Alabama) and Spelman College (Georgia). Howard University is considered

the capstone of black education. On the other hand, there are marginal black colleges, just as there are marginal white colleges. The coming decades will probably see an educational Darwinism in which only the fittest institutions will survive.

Black institutions were created primarily to provide education for black people. Despite overwhelming odds, the historically black institutions have done this job very well. If black colleges and universities were eliminated, there is little evidence that predominantly white institutions would be willing to assume the task of educating academically and financially disadvantaged students with the same degree of zeal that the historically black institutions have done. Moreover, the high attrition rate which blacks suffer in predominantly white institutions raises concerns as to whether the majority of these institutions can provide the social and psychological climate in which the average black student can survive. By contrast, many black institutions, because of the commitment to serve all students regardless of previous preparation, have achieved high rates of retention which have resulted in persistence to graduation. The National Advisory Committee on Black Education states: "Until other institutions can guarantee this level of access coupled with completion rates, the relative worth of Black institutions should remain unquestioned."[14]

On the philosophical level, it is arguable that the loss of historically black institutions would alter the fundamentally diverse character of American higher education. This diversity is consonant with the goal of providing multiple opportunities for the populace. There is no contradiction in an institution's being historically black (a fact of history) and being responsive to a multi-ethnic student body, just as there is no contradiction in an institution's being historically white (a fact of history) and being

responsive to various types of students. Colleges and universities will continue to have an appeal to various students for various reasons. In a truly democratic society, each individual should be free to choose the institution which suits his/her needs, and no institution should be allowed to exclude any individual by arbitrary and artifical means.

On January 17, 1979, President Carter issued a directive to Federal agencies and department heads directing them to initiate action to see that black colleges and universities receive more attention from the Federal government. The directive stated, in part, "The continuing importance of historically black colleges and universities, not only to students but also to this Nation's social, economic, and educational life, cannot be over-estimated. This Administration is committed to enhancing their strength and prosperity."[15] The presidential directive is a step in the right direction. The development of a national policy towards the historically black colleges and universities is long overdue.

In their Sisyphean climb towards progress, some historically black institutions have reached the place where their worth is recognized, and there is a call for their enhancement. Will the dream now be shattered by the economy and demographic data? Must the stone fall to the bottom again? Enhancement has not been tried and found wanting; it has not been tried in enough places with enough zeal. The enhancement of historically black colleges and universities must be a priority item on the agenda of American higher education in the 1980's.

Footnotes

[1]The term "historically black institution" is used to refer to 108 institutions which were founded for blacks although their charters were not exclusionary. These institutions are still predominantly black in enrollment. Another term, "Newer predominantly black colleges" is used to refer to recently established institutions which were founded for the general population but have become predominantly black in enrollment because of geographic location. In Maryland, Morgan State University is considered a "historically black" institution while the Community College of Baltimore is considered a "newer predominantly black college."

[2]Abraham Flexner, Medical Education in the United States and Canada: A Report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Boston: D.B. Updike, 1910.

[3]The Adams Case resulted from a suit filed in 1970 by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund which charged that the Department of Health, Education and Welfare had not taken enforcement action against ten states which were operating segregated systems of higher education. These ten states were: Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Florida, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Maryland and Virginia. In 1973 these states were ordered by the U.S. District Court to file acceptable state higher education desegregation plans.

[4]Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, "The American Negro College," Harvard Education Review 37 (November 1, 1967): 3-60.

[5]"Revised Criteria Specifying the Ingredients of Acceptable Plans to Desegregate State Systems of Public Higher Education," Federal Register (Wednesday, February 15, 1978), 6658 - 6664. (Hereinafter referred to as Federal Register.)

[6]Ibid.

[7]Report of Task Force to Propose Ways of Enhancing the Role and Image of Predominantly Black Public Colleges in Maryland (Annapolis: Maryland Council for Higher Education, 1974), 111-2.

[8]State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, The Virginia Plan for Equal Opportunity in State-Supported Institutions of Higher Education, Revised 1978 (Richmond: State Council of Higher Education, 1979), 19-23.

[9]Federal Register, p. 6661.

[10]William Moore, Jr. and Lonnie H. Wagstaff, Black Educators in White Colleges (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974).

[11]Report of Task Force to Propose Ways of Enhancing the Role and Image of Predominantly Black Public Colleges in Maryland, p. III-6.

[12]Edward B. Fiske, "A New Kind of Shortage: Students," New York Times (November 11, 1979).

[13]Ibid.

[14]National Advisory Committee on Black Education and Black Colleges and Universities, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Black Colleges and Universities: An Essential Component of a Diverse System of Higher Education, September 1979, 70.

[15]Luther Brown, "Carter Issues Directive on Black Colleges," ISEP Monitor (December, 1978), 2.